

Lawsuit Accuses Church of Scientology of Multimillion-Dollar Deception

Two former members of the **Church of Scientology** have filed a lawsuit accusing the church of deceiving members into donating millions of dollars to church-backed projects and programs they claim were never completed.

Luis and Maria Garcia, a couple from Irvine, California, who quit the church more than two years ago, made the accusation in a lawsuit filed in a federal court in Tampa, Florida.

The couple allege they donated more than \$420,000 to a building project and other church initiatives including counseling services but that the church “improperly utilized” the money.

The construction project was to build the church’s “Super Power” building in Clearwater, Fla., using more than \$200 million in total donations raised by the church, the lawsuit contends. But the lawsuit claims that less than half the money was spent on construction and that the building stands empty more than 14 years after the groundbreaking ceremony.

According to the lawsuit, the Garcias learned the money they donated was used to “stifle inquiries into the church’s activities and finances” and bankroll “the lavish lifestyle” of its leader, David Miscavige.

“The Church, under the leadership of David Miscavige, has strayed from its founding principles and morphed into a secular enterprise whose primary purpose is taking people’s money,” the lawsuit, which was filed on Tuesday, alleges.

Church of Scientology spokeswoman Pat Harney said the church

has yet to be served with the lawsuit but she dismissed the claims and called the lawsuit “frivolous.”

“We understand from the media that this has something to do with fundraising and we can unequivocally state all funds solicited are used for the charitable and religious purposes for which they were donated,” she said in an emailed statement.

The lawsuit states it is not intended to question whether the church is a religion. The Church of Scientology was founded by science-fiction writer **L. Ron Hubbard** and has attracted several Hollywood stars as followers including Tom Cruise and John Travolta.

Critics of Scientology describe the movement as a **cult**, which they say harasses people who seek to quit. The church rejects the criticism.

Luis Garcia told reporters he had been a Church of Scientology member for 28 years. Garcia said he and his wife donated a total of \$1.3 million to the church but left in November 2010, frustrated with its direction under Miscavige.

“It is my belief and my opinion that I have been lied to,” he said.

The lawsuit, which names five entities tied to the church, claims the Garcias frequently received urgent requests to help fund some of its work including initiatives to eradicate child pornography.

Contributions to the programs were “vastly underutilized or misappropriated,” the lawsuit says.

The case is Luis A. Garcia Saz and Maria Del Rocio Burgos Garcia vs. the Church of Scientology Religious Trust et al, U.S. Middle District of Florida, No. 8:13CV220T27TBM.

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